



# Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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## Horse owners urged to pursue West Nile virus vaccination

**OLYMPIA** — With the season turning to spring this weekend, mosquitoes can't be far away. State Veterinarian Dr. Leonard Eldridge advises horse owners to take precautions against mosquitoes and a disease many mosquito species carry, West Nile virus.

A bite by an infected mosquito can result in infection of horses, humans and many species of birds. Horses in Oregon and Idaho last year were diagnosed with West Nile virus (WNV), while Washington was the only state in the lower 48 U.S. that did not detect WNV activity. It remains a threat coast-to-coast, however.

"Now is the time to vaccinate your horse against the disease," Eldridge said. "If horses are being vaccinated for the first time, they need a series of two doses, three to six weeks apart. If the horse was previously vaccinated with the series, it needs an annual booster before the beginning of the mosquito season. Horse owners should contact their private veterinarians for vaccination and other health information."

The best way to minimize the threat of WNV is to control mosquitoes and prevent horses from being exposed to adult mosquitoes. Some protective measures include changing the water in livestock troughs, fountains, birdbaths and wading pools weekly during mosquito season. Owners may also consider draining or treating stagnant water, mowing grass and weeds, putting up screens to protect homes and stables from mosquitoes, and putting horses in stables at night. Repellents and insecticides should be used only according to label directions, and it is important not to drain or fill wetlands, as they provide benefits that far outweigh the small chance of contracting WNV.

Veterinarians and horse owners should alert the State Veterinarian's office if they observe unusual signs of illness in any equine, to include horse, mules, ponies and donkeys. Signs of West Nile virus in these animals can include loss of appetite, listlessness, stumbling, lack of coordination, weakness of limbs, partial paralysis and death. The incubation period in a horse appears to be from three to 15 days. While many exposed equines show no signs of illness, WNV can be fatal in about 30 percent of the cases. Horses contract the disease from carrier mosquitoes and are not contagious to other horses or people.

More WNV information is available on the following Web sites:

**Department of Agriculture:** <http://agr.wa.gov/FoodAnimal/AnimalHealth/Diseases/WestNileVirus/default.htm>

**Department of Health:** [www.doh.wa.gov/wnv/](http://www.doh.wa.gov/wnv/)

**U.S. Department of Agriculture:** <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/lpa/issues/wnv/wnv.html>

**Washington State University:** <http://www.wnv.wsu.edu>.

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